



# First settlements in Central Europe: Between originality and banality



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## ABSTRACT

The situation of Central Europe during the Lower Palaeolithic seems to be original. Evidence of human occupations before 0.5 million years ago is sparse and handaxes are absent during the entire Lower Palaeolithic. Despite being located on the “Out of Africa” route towards Europe, this region has not yielded the expected archaeological evidence.

At the end of the Lower Palaeolithic, between 0.4 and 0.3 Ma, the lithic industries are mainly characterized by a small tool production. This typical production can be analyzed in two lithic assemblages (Vértesszőlös in Hungary and Bilzingsleben in Germany). If those assemblages are original compared to the Western Acheulean, some elements can be likened to some other industries in Southern Europe. The results of this study of the first lithic industries from Central Europe allow reconsideration of settlement dynamics in Europe at the end of the Lower Palaeolithic. The classical division between Eastern and Western Europe can be discussed, according to the criteria in the definition of the different Lower Palaeolithic cultural entities and technical systems.

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## 1. Introduction

Central European Lower Palaeolithic settlements are poorly taken into account in the early colonization models. This may be due to the lack of sites and research in this region, but also to the absence of handaxes until the early middle Palaeolithic (Müller-Beck, 1977; Otte, 2003; Bosinski, 2006; Doronichev and Golovanova, 2010; Moncel et al., 2015). Central Europe has a key position between the Near East, Central and Southern Asia, Mediterranean, and Western Europe. It is therefore necessary to understand the technical tradition present in this region during the Lower Palaeolithic, in order to replace them in a broader framework.

The period between 0.4 and 0.3 Ma is of particular interest, because sites before 0.4 Ma are very few in this region, and the Holsteinian interglacial represents an increasing moment. On the other hand, this period is important from a technical point of view, as the features of the lithic industries are original. Beyond the absence of handaxes, the assemblages seem to show specific technical options (Valoch, 1977; Vértes, 1990; Derevianko et al., 2000; Burdukiewicz, 2003; Dobosi, 2003; Derevianko, 2006; Doronichev, 2008). These peculiarities are expressed both in the reduction sequence and in the tool features (Rocca, 2013).

The aim of this paper is thus a first step to characterize the technical features in Central Europe during the Holsteinian. To

reach this goal, it is necessary to frame this moment in the Lower Palaeolithic evolution (Table 1). The final objective of this work is to compare the central European lithic industries with the Western European ones. Only integration of all evidence in Europe will allow proposal of a hypothesis concerning the settlement dynamic during this particular moment, at the onset of the Middle Palaeolithic.

## 2. Regional settings

The discussed area includes all the territories between the Rhine River to the west and the Ural Mountains to the east (Fig. 1). These boundaries are of course very coarse and do not correspond to a physical geographical unit. The outlines of this area are based on the specificity of lithic industry and possibly by investigation history.

This region does not fit in the current models proposed for the early colonization of Europe. Except for Kozarnika in Bulgaria (Guadelli et al. 2005; Sirakov et al. 2010), no undoubted sites before 0.5 Ma are present in this region. This may be contradictory with the “Out of Africa 1” model that proposed a first arrival in Europe before 1 Ma from Africa through Central Europe (Carbonell et al., 1999; Bar-Yosef and Belfer-Cohen, 2001). The problem arises about the hypothesis of a second arrival in Europe at 0.8/0.6 Ma (Bar-Yosef and Belfer-Cohen, 2001). This proposal is based on the new occurrence of handaxes in Western Europe (Piperno, 1999;

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**Table 1**  
List of the Central European sites cited in the text (\*studied samples).

Site	Country	Age	References
Kozarnika	Bulgaria	MIS -19	Guadelli et al., 2005; Sirakov et al., 2010
Korolevo VII*	Ukraine	MIS 25/26	Haesaerts and Koulakovskaia, 2006; Koulakovskaia et al., 2010
Korolevo VI*	Ukraine	MIS 15/13	Haesaerts and Koulakovskaia, 2006; Koulakovskaia et al., 2010
Misenheim	Germany	MIS 13	Turner, 1989; Turner et al., 2000
Kärlich-Seeufer*	Germany	MIS 11	Gaudzinski, 1996; Gaudzinski et al., 1996
Marathousa	Greece	MIS 11/9?	Panagopoulou et al., 2015
Vértesszölös	Hungary	MIS 12/11	Kretzoi and Dobosi, 1990
Rusko*	Poland	MIS 11	Burdukiewicz, 2003
Dealul Guran	Romania	MIS 11	Iovita et al., 2012, 2014
Schöningen 13	Germany	MIS 9	Richter and Krubetschek, in press
Bilzingsleben*	Germany	MIS 9	Mania 1990; Beck et al., 2007; Müller and Pasda, 2011
Neumark-Nord 3	Germany	MIS 9	Brühl and Laurat, 2007
Korolevo Va	Ukraine	MIS 8	Haesaerts and Koulakovskaia, 2006; Koulakovskaia 2004
Markkleeberg	Germany	MIS 8	Mania, 2004; Wisniewski, 2014

Barsky and de Lumley, 2010; Moncel et al., 2013, in press; Vallverdú et al., 2014; Mosquera et al., in press). However, no handaxes have been found in Central Europe from MIS 8.

Therefore, this region can principally be defined by the absence of early occupations and absence of handaxes. However, even if they are rarely considered in the colonization models, Lower Palaeolithic sites are present in this region. The Kozarnika sequence in Bulgaria offers several occupation levels (13a to 11c) dated between 1.1 and 0.8 Ma (Guadelli et al. 2005; Sirakov et al. 2010). In Ukraine, the site of Korolevo has yielded two lower Palaeolithic assemblages (Adamenko and Gladilina, 1989; Koulakovskaia, 2006; Koulakovskaia et al., 2010). Level VII, dated around 0.95 Ma (Haesaerts and Koulakovskaia, 2006) contains only 7 items

(Koulakovskaia et al., 2010), but level VI, attributed to 0.5 Ma (Haesaerts and Koulakovskaia, 2006) consists of a collection of more than 1500 artefacts (Koulakovskaia et al., 2010). In Germany, the neighbouring sites of Misenheim (Turner, 1989; Turner et al., 2000) and Kärlich-Seeufer (Gaudzinski, 1996; Gaudzinski et al., 1996) also belong to this period between 0.5 and 0.45 Ma.

The number of sites increases during the following period. At 0.4 Ma, two adjacent sites are present in Poland: Rusko and Tzrebica (Burdukiewicz, 2003); one in Hungary: Vértesszölös (Kretzoi and Dobosi, 1990), the site of Dealul Guran in Romania (Iovita et al., 2012, 2014) and probably the site of Marathousa in Greece (Panagopoulou et al., 2015). In Germany, the sites of Bilzingsleben (Mania and Weber, 1986; Mania, 1990), Schöningen (Thieme et al.,



**Fig. 1.** Map of the principal sites in Central Europe during Lower Palaeolithic and Early middle Palaeolithic.

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